Politics of the Enlightenment
History 71000
Professor Helena Rosenblatt
Hrosenblatt@gc.cuny.edu 212-817-8440
Thursdays 4:15-6:15
Office hours: by appointment

Course Description: Since the mid-20th century, the Enlightenment has been under attack for a variety of purported sins, including Euro-centrism, imperialism, racism, sexism, and proto-totalitarianism. In fact, Enlightenment-bashing has become such a popular sport that many intellectuals are now feeling the need to “rescue,” “reclaim,” and “redeem” it for the progressive goals they say were at its core. In this course, we will read texts by some of the most important political writers of the Enlightenment (Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Ferguson, Jefferson and Wollstonecraft) with a focus on the following themes: the social contract and the role of government, property and commerce, race and slavery, women and religion. We will also read recent critiques and defenses of the Enlightenment, with a view to deciding for ourselves whether it is worth “reclaiming”.

Course Learning Objectives:
Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to
*Read texts more critically and effectively
*Identify and summarize ideas in texts in an articulate and persuasive manner, verbally and in writing
*Display a grasp of the key concepts associated with enlightenment
*Display a grasp of the key criticisms levied at the enlightenment.

Course Requirements:
Students are expected to come to all class meetings having carefully read the assigned text and prepared to engage in vigorous discussion, debate and textual analysis.

*Regular and intelligent class participation demonstrating thorough reading of assigned texts and at least two oral, in-class summaries of a “recommended” readings: 20%
*One 5-10 minute class presentation on one of the required readings on our list, introducing its main themes in the aim of initiating a class discussion 20%
*A 25-30 page paper on a topic chosen in consultation with me. Topics must be decided and approved by Nov. 13; final paper submitted by Dec. 11. No late papers will be accepted. 40%
*An orally presented book review on the last day of class (list of books provided below) 20%
Course Schedule with Required Readings:

August 28. Introduction.

September 4. Before the Enlightenment.

Excerpts from:
Loysseu, *A Treatise on Orders*
Bossuet, *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*
Filmer, *Patriarcha*

Find these readings at: http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/

September 11. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*

SKIM but do not SKIP the First Treatise; read carefully the Second.
There are many good paperback editions of Locke’s *Two Treatises* available on the market; but please do get a hard copy that you can bring to class.

September 18. Critiques of Locke
Read either two articles on Locke from the list below or the chapter in Macpherson


Find this text at http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/


September 25 NO CLASS

October 2. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*
Again, there are many good paperback versions of the *Persian Letters* available on the market, but please do get a hard copy that you can bring to class.

Recommended:


**October 9. Other approaches to the Politics of the Enlightenment**


**October 16. Rousseau, First and Second Discourses**

I strongly recommend the Hackett edition –it is a decent translation at a good price and contains all three texts that we will be reading (The *First and Second Discourses* as well as the *Social Contract*).

Recommended:


**October 23. Rousseau. On the Social Contract**

Recommended:

Find this text at [http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/](http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/)

**October 30. Talmon and Adorno and Horkheimer**
Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*
Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
Find these texts at [http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/](http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/)

**November 6. Locke’s Letter on Toleration, Rousseau’s “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,” and Kant’s What is Enlightenment?**
Find the Rousseau and Kant text at [http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/](http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/)

**November 13. Rousseau’s Emile (excerpt on Sophie) and Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman**
Find the excerpt from *Emile* at: [http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/](http://enlightenment.commons.gc.cuny.edu/)

Recommended:


**November 20**  
Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*  
There are many editions of this available. I personally use the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edition—but there are also online versions that are perfectly fine. Either purchase a hard copy or download and print out an online version or bring your laptops to class so that we/you can refer to specific passages in the text during our discussion.

Recommended:


**November 27 NO CLASS**

**December 4** Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings*  
I recommend the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edition edited by Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball. As I write this, there are used editions available at amazon.com for as low as $3.50

Recommended:


More on Jefferson and slavery
Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, pp. 169-83
Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*, chaps 5-6
John Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears*

**December 11 Student Oral presentations**
Pick a book from the list below and review it with reference to what you have learned this term—and tell us if you agree with the book or not (and why).

Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind*
David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*
Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity*
Stephen Bronner, *Reclaiming the Enlightenment*